

COMMENTS ON THE PROPOSED SUPPRESSION OF *VESPERTILIO SUBULATUS* SAY, 1823. Z.N.(S.) 1701

By Charles A. Long (Department of Zoology, University of Illinois, Urbana, Illinois, U.S.A.)

Owing to arbitrary designations of dubious descriptions to some western bats of the genus *Myotis*, to scanty knowledge of the variation in these bats, and to difficulty in identifying with certainty many preserved specimens of this genus, the stability of names in *Myotis* is likely to be frequently threatened. One threat has been raised by Glass and Baker (*Bull. zool. Nomencl.* 22 (3) : 204-205, 1965), who present their opinion that the type-description of *Vespertilio subulatus* Say, 1823, fits bats known now as *M. yumanensis* H. Allen, 1864, and that the description does not fit bats currently known as *M. subulatus*, nor other *Myotis* bats occurring near Say's type-locality. Although several characters attributed to current *yumanensis* and *subulatus* may not be diagnostic for them (e.g., flying low in *yumanensis*, high in *subulatus*; bright chestnut colour in *subulatus*), I agree that Say's holotype is probably *M. yumanensis*, because of all the bats mentioned only *yumanensis* is dull greyish and small except for its long hind foot. These characters usually distinguish bats known as *yumanensis* from the bats mentioned by Glass and Baker, and in addition from *M. lucifugus phasma*, which is extremely pale. The colour of *yumanensis* is certainly more nearly "dull cinereous" than is that of *M. subulatus*.

A thorny character is the tail length, which Say's data indicate is about 70 per cent of head and body length; Miller and Allen (*Bull. U.S. nat. Mus.* 144 : 61, 1928) mention that comparable percentages in *M. yumanensis* are all high and exceed 80 per cent. However, a measuring error of 0.1 inch would raise Say's value to about 80 per cent.

If Say's bat is not to be regarded as *M. subulatus* (and on the basis of length of hind foot and colour, such assumption seems valid), then priority requires that bats known as *subulatus* will be known as *M. leibi* (Audubon and Bachman), 1842, as proposed by Glass and Baker. Practicality requires that raising *leibi* to valid use as a specific name dates from their proposal.

Any of several nomenclatural solutions could be adopted. (1) Strict adherence to Priority would cause bats now known as *subulatus* to be known as *leibi*, and bats now known as *yumanensis* to be called *subulatus*. This procedure would be disruptive to nomenclature but I am sure would be received favourably by many taxonomists. (2) The Commission could conserve both *subulatus* and *yumanensis* in their now established meanings. However, such conservation precludes use of well-established older synonyms of these names (see below). Conservation of both of two well-established names that have been applied to a single bat might be confusing and would be a very liberal, perhaps reckless, nomenclatural practice involving the principle of conservation of names. (3) A third alternative is the action proposed by Glass and Baker: to suppress *subulatus*, to use *leibi*, and to conserve *yumanensis*. (4) The final alternative, here endorsed, is suppression of *subulatus* without concomitant conservation of *yumanensis*. Conservation of *yumanensis* is premature in view of our imperfect knowledge of western *Myotis*. Such conservation would be undesirable if conserved *yumanensis* were, for example, found to be conspecific with the older name *M. californicus*, which is applied to bats closely resembling some that have been known as *M. lucifugus phasma*. *M. l. phasma* may rightly belong to *yumanensis* (Harris and Findley, *J. Mammal.*, 43 : 193, 1962). If older *lucifugus* and conserved *yumanensis* are ever regarded as conspecific, well-established *lucifugus* and its subspecific names would also be endangered by conserved *yumanensis*. No useful purpose would be accomplished in conserving *yumanensis* H. Allen. Although fast becoming customary, it is not always necessary to propose conservation of a name that is threatened by another name requested to be suppressed. For example, Long (*Bull. zool. Nomencl.* 21 (4) : 319; 21 (5) : 371, 1964) requested such conservation that in my present opinion

is unnecessary, because suppression of the *nomina oblita* is sufficient to promote stability of nomenclature.

In summary, I strongly recommend that the Commission suppress *V. subulatus* Say, but that it not conserve *M. yumanensis* (H. Allen).

By E. Raymond Hall (*Museum of Natural History, Lawrence, Kansas, U.S.A.*)

Glass and Baker propose that the name *Vespertilio subulatus* Say, 1823, be suppressed in order to permit use of the name *Vespertilio yumanensis* H. Allen, 1864.

A better procedure, and one that can be expected to lead sooner to stability of nomenclature in the mammalian genus *Myotis* is to apply the Law of Priority. Consequently it is recommended that the proposal by Glass and Baker be turned down.

Incidentally the name *Myotis yumanensis* H. Allen has been applied to each of several kinds of *Myotis* in the past 101 years.

By W. B. Davis (*Texas A. & M. University, College Station, Texas, U.S.A.*)

I have reviewed material pertinent to this proposal and I am convinced that the specific name *subulatus* Say, 1823, and *yumanensis* H. Allen, 1864, were originally applied to individuals of the population of bats currently known as *Myotis yumanensis*.

In view of the fact that the name *subulatus* Say has at various times been applied to no less than three different species of *Myotis*, confusion would be compounded by transferring it to the population which has been known as *Myotis yumanensis* H. Allen since 1864, simply because Say's name has priority. With the object of conserving the name *yumanensis* which has consistently been applied to our pale, large-footed southwestern *Myotis* for more than a century, I recommend that the Commission approve the request as submitted by Glass and Baker.